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## **MANCHESTER'S ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT: URBAN PUBLIC HOUSES, ENTERPRISE AND THE HOLDEN FAMILY 1840-1870**

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The sporting landscape altered during the nineteenth century as industrialisation transformed the leisure patterns of British society. As both space and time available for sport reduced, traditional pastimes were repackaged for new urban environment. The public house became instrumental in regulating the leisure time of the city's inhabitants, with the publicans becoming gatekeepers to working-class pursuits by procuring land for sporting purpose and providing the foundations for regulation and administration. Pedestrianism, the forerunner to modern athletics, became a lucrative commercial enterprise, having been successfully integrated into the urban sporting model through public house endorsement. By considering the entrepreneurial nature of athletic entertainments, which were controlled and governed by individuals rather than specific sporting organisations, this paper explores the Holden family and their significance on the development of pedestrianism within the city.

The relationship between sportsmen and public houses has long been noted, but these examples are usually limited in scope and do little beyond documenting the individual achievements of each subject. By taking a collective biographical approach, whereby individuals are studied through more measured techniques, the impact of Manchester's athletic community in developing the local and national sporting landscape can be considered.

At a time of natural decline, Manchester's pedestrian scene was thriving amid the numerous taverns, inns and running grounds established around the city centre. By developing their own programme of events, which opposed the formalised amateur institutions that were beginning to appear throughout Britain, these athletic entrepreneurs created a culture for professional activities that has had little acknowledgement to date. The Holden family helped to control and organise Manchester's sporting calendar, with their principles and innovations responsible for resurging public interest in athletic entertainment. By exploring the interconnections between different members of the Holden dynasty, the positive impact of such communities on the local sporting environment is evident.

## Introduction

Between 1780 and 1840, during the early industrial age, leisure entertainments grew in strength, supported by innovations in technology, transport and the development of popular culture.<sup>1</sup> The expansion of the railway contributed to the development of, and access to, sport by providing travel options and widening access for competitors and spectators alike, thus enabling national competition on a much larger scale.<sup>2</sup> The demand for sporting news accelerated, and businesses and entrepreneurial companies responded; newspapers increased sport coverage, racing programmes were printed and sport-specific equipment produced, all providing profitability at a time of economic expansion.<sup>3</sup> An awareness of the marketable viability of such endeavours provided the catalyst for sport's presence within society. It was no longer a marginal activity but became a 'commercialised mass culture' in its own right.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1800 and 1850, sport was increasingly commercialised and private gardens and public house fields became ideal locations for leisure opportunities. Pugilism and horseracing, among the earliest commercial ventures, were widely patronised whilst cricket, pedestrianism and wrestling were emerging as popular spectator activities, with crowds being charged to watch these competitions unfold.<sup>5</sup> According to Scambler, the 'control of pedestrianism transferred to the taprooms and public houses', especially in the city centre where talented working-class men were pursuing running as a source of income. The inclusion of the 1838 chronology of pedestrianism in the pages of *Bell's Life* demonstrated the Victorian population's knowledge of, and interest in, the sport with the names of popular enclosures prominent, such as Hyde Park, Sheffield, and the White Lion/Hackney Wick, London, and their publican owners were familiar household names.<sup>6</sup> By developing their own programme of events, which opposed the formalised amateur institutions that were beginning to appear throughout Britain, sporting entrepreneurs (mostly pub-owning men) created a culture for professional athletic activities. This paper examines one of Manchester's influential sporting families, the Holden "family", taking a collective biographical approach to consider their interconnections and their impact on the success of sporting entertainment within the city.

To provide clarity, the term "family" is used here to incorporate both immediate and extended relations as well as those who form part of the larger community that surrounded the Holden dynasty

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Croll, 'Popular Leisure and Sport', in *A Companion to 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 400.

<sup>2</sup> James Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1978), 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 77; Huggins and Tolson, 'The Railways and Sport in Victorian Britain: a Critical Reassessment': 100.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Tate, 'The Professionalisation of Sports Journalism, c1850 to 1939, with Particular Reference to the Career of James Catton' (PhD diss., University of Central Lancashire, 2007), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Scambler, *Sport and Society: History, Power and Culture*, 34-35.

during the mid-nineteenth century. As stated by Gordon and Nair, ‘the life-span of the family [moves beyond the] standard nuclear [model, and] no clear distinctions can be made between friends and family, neighbours and family, for very often friends and neighbours *were* family’.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Holden Era of Pedestrianism: Development and Expansion*

James Holden, born 1797 in Lancashire,<sup>8</sup> was at the centre of Manchester’s sporting development having entered into the drinks trade in 1834. His establishment, the White Lion Inn on Long Millgate,<sup>9</sup> was at the heart of working-class Manchester<sup>10</sup> and provided the ideal location for his sporting empire to develop. His continued support of local sport provided him with a reputation as ‘the great stakeholder of Lancashire pedestrianism’, contributing to his lifelong authority within Manchester sport.<sup>11</sup> In order to further establish his position within the sporting community, Holden forged ties with local athletes, publicans and sport promoters, establishing a network of men (and sometimes women) who continued to support sporting activities and create a hub for athletic competition in Manchester.

Holden enhanced his status and his sporting networks by taking stakes for high profile matches as well as attending local racing venues to fulfil match day duties.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, he assumed a more prominent role as judge and referee, and devised articles of agreement that were held at the White Lion.<sup>13</sup> The public house became a renowned meeting place for athletes where matches could be

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<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 47-48.

<sup>8</sup> *England and Wales Christening Records 1530-1906* (1068835), James Holden (July, 1796); John Holden (June 10, 1792); Ann Holden (April 9, 1794); Henry Holden (December 1799); Robert Holden (September 1803).

<sup>9</sup> James Pigot, *Pigot & Co.’s 1834 Directory of Northern Counties* (Manchester: J. Pigot, 1834), 465.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Echo Library, 2009), 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Bell’s Life*, April 17, 1836, 7; August 5, 1838, 7; *Census Returns*, James Holden 1841 (HO 107/573/4); James Pigot and Isaac Slater, *Pigot & Slater’s Directory of Manchester & Salford, 1841* (Manchester: Pigot & Slater, 1841), 130; *Era*, January 8, 1843, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Bell’s Life*, November 6, 1842, 7; December 18, 1842, 7; January 22, 1843, 7; April 9, 1843, 7; June 18, 1843, 7; July 30, 1843, 7; January 21, 1844, 7; September 15, 1844, 7; November 10, 1844, 7; July 6, 1845; November 9, 1845, 7; January 25, 1846, 7; March 8, 1846, 7; April 19, 1846, 7; May 31, 1846, 7; June 28, 1846, 7; October 11, 1846, 7; December 13, 1846, 7; January 24, 1847, 6; April 18, 1847, 7; June 20, 1847, 7; August 15, 1847, 7; October 24, 1847, 7; December 26, 1847, 7; February 13, 1848, 6; June 11, 1848, 7; December 3, 1848, 7; January 21, 1849, 7; March 11, 1849, 6; April 8, 1849, 6; July 1, 1849, 7; September 9, 1849, 7; November 11, 1849, 7; December 23, 1849, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Bell’s Life*, December 10, 1843, 7; November 16, 1845, 7; December 7, 1845, 7; February 21, 1847, 7; January 9, 1848, 7; February 27, 1848, 7; February 4, 1849, 7; April 1, 1849, 6; July 22, 1849, 3; July 28, 1849, 7; *Era*, August 13, 1848.

organised and accommodation provided for travelling competitors.<sup>14</sup> By integrating several members of his family into the drink trade, Holden was able to expand his control over sport within the city.<sup>15</sup>

Of the Holden children, three continued to work in public houses - daughters Alice and Sarah, and son James Jnr. According to Bailey, the employment of family, especially women, in the pub environment was commonplace. Women provided patrons with allure, hospitality and excitement, whereas the male embodied control, governance and legacy within the establishment.<sup>16</sup> The seduction of the barmaid was one of the attractions of the inn and, given the publican's concern over respectability, wives and daughters would be utilised to fulfil this role.<sup>17</sup> Expansion through marriage also provided legitimacy for the business and further opportunities for investment (and success). Females were expected to finance the home as well as provide families, and the drinks trade enabled women to work side-by-side with their partners in ensuring success.<sup>18</sup> Holden's network increased due, in part, to the connections surrounding his daughters. Eldest daughter, Alice Holden, was a regular feature at the White Lion, tending to the business in the absence of her father. Whilst working in the family trade she met and wed sporting personality George Martin in 1851.<sup>19</sup> The marriage benefitted both parties; Martin's celebrity status provided a platform for further exposure, and Holden's reputation enabled Martin to have a quick transition from athlete to successful sporting entrepreneur. Similarly, daughter Sarah Holden married ex-professional rower George Piers in 1852,<sup>20</sup> and later resided at the White Lion where the newly-weds took on additional roles within the business and within the sporting community.<sup>21</sup>

These new players within the Holden family enabled further connections to be established and, therefore, empowered Holden's network, providing further contacts who then became part of the sporting periphery. For example, Martin's status as an entrepreneurial professional athlete, trainer and, later, sporting proprietor, provided the family with a host of contacts that became acquainted

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<sup>14</sup> *Bell's Life*, August 7, 1842; November 6, 1842; December 25, 1842; February 26, 1843; April 2, 1843, 7; December 10, 1843, 7; July 14, 1844, 7; July 21, 1844, 7; April 27, 1845, 7; March 1, 1846, 7; April 19, 1846, 7; June 28, 1846, 7; August 2, 1846, 7; September 13, 1846, 7; November 22, 1846, 7; January 3, 1847, 7; February 7, 1847, 6; February 28, 1847, 7; March 14, 1847, 6; July 11, 1847, 7; September 5, 1847, 6; August 20, 1848, 7; January 7, 1849, 7; February 4, 1849, 7; April 22, 1849, 6; June 24, 1849, 7; November 25, 1849, 7; December 23, 1849, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Census Returns*, James Holden 1851 (HO 107/2229).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour: the Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', *Gender & History* 2, no. 2 (1990): 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Hargreaves, 'The Victorian Cult of the Family and the Early Years of Female Sport', in *Gender and Sport: A Reader*, eds. Sheila Scratton and Anne Flintoff (London: Routledge, 2002), 54.

<sup>19</sup> *Marriage Certificate*, George Martin and Alice Holden 1851 (MXE 606479); *Era*, January 26, 1851, 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Bell's Life*, February 21, 1847, 5; *Marriage Certificate*, George Piers and Sarah Holden 1852 (MXF 084965); *Manchester Guardian*, October 9, 1852, 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Census Returns*, 1861 (RG 9/2950), Cathedral Church, Manchester, 4 Long Millgate 'White Lion', James Holden, Head, 62, 'public house keeper'; Elizabeth Holden, Daughter, 20; George Pearse (Piers), Son-in-Law, 30, 'letter-press printer'; Sarah Pearse (Piers), Daughter, 27; Sarah A. Pearse (Piers), Grand-child, 7; Elizabeth Pearse (Piers), Grand-child, 4.

with their system of sporting provision. Martin's purchase of the Royal Oak, Newton Heath, and the development of his sporting arena, became a way of enabling the family to export and control Manchester's sporting circuit. However, there was competition! In order to reduce friction, Martin liaised with Copenhagen Ground owner, Thomas Hayes, whose well-established running arena was a five-minute walk away. By joining forces, Hayes and Martin provided programmes of sporting entertainment that saw competitions migrate from the city centre (Holden's pub) to the Royal Oak and Copenhagen Grounds, enabling sporting spectators to enjoy a full day of activities and the proprietors maximised profits as a result. Other members of the Holden family has similar connections with other arenas and individuals which, in turn, transferred the family's values and views to the general populace, helping to construct a community of athletes, trainers, sporting grounds and general sporting men who had different forms and levels of connection and access to Holden's network. Piers: regularly starter/referee, taking on additional tasks in Holden's absence,<sup>22</sup> as well as forming ties with Waddacor's City Grounds, managed by "Sergeant" John Brittain, Martin: Albison's Moston Park, James Holden Jnr, a professional sprinter himself,<sup>23</sup> had assisted his father in running the White Lion from 1864. He was also regularly seen at the various Manchester (Snipe Inn, Audenshaw, and the Park Inn Grounds, Prestwich) and Sheffield grounds, assuming the role of referee and timekeeper<sup>24</sup>. Essentially, these individuals were a product of the system whether they are aware or not – those who conformed were then allowed access whereas those who did not were pushed out and rejected from within the city.

Even during their final years, the sporting community continued to rally around the family. In 1865, Manchester lost two of its major sporting promoters (Holden & Martin) within a few short months and there was concern that Manchester sport would not recover.<sup>25</sup> Charitable and sporting benefit funds were raised for Martin's widow and seven young children and pedestrian friends and family members continued his legacy, sharing the responsibilities of proprietor, referee, starter, stakeholder and timekeeper at the Royal Oak. Holden Jnr managed the grounds as well as his father's establishment, William Richards continued to promote Royal Oak events, and Hayes supported these activities whilst searching for a buyer.<sup>26</sup> In September 1866, local sporting referee, John Cooper, took license of the establishment where he continued to work with Holden Jnr, Hayes and the City Grounds'

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<sup>22</sup> *Era*, June 7, 1857, 8; October 10, 1858, 10; October 17, 1858, 10; April 14, 1861, 10; *Manchester Guardian*, October 28, 1861, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Era*, February 22, 1857, 13; October 3, 1858, 10; June 5, 1859, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Bell's Life*, May 13, 1865, 7; May 20, 1865, 7; October 21, 1865, 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Bell's Life*, November 4, 1865, 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Bell's Life*, October 28, 1865, 7; *Marriage Certificate*, William Richards and Sarah Selina Davies, July 10, 1866, Address: Royal Oak, Newton Heath (GB127.M403/6/3/42); Roe, *Front Runners*, 126; Sears, *Running Through the Ages*, 139.

Waddacor, Lang and Brittain.<sup>27</sup> The grounds continued to attract customers with trotting and cycling proving popular events alongside traditional pedestrian activities, all managed by the Cooper father and son team.<sup>28</sup> Even with these “new” individuals entering the athletic sphere, the Holden values were still promoted through those who remained and had moved further within the network to become instrumental and integral players.

### *Holden Connections and Conclusions: A Thematic View*

Whilst these biographical snippets provide insight into each individual’s life, themes can be drawn from the collective and discussed in relation to the role of the nineteenth-century entrepreneur.

While some patrons were well-to-do men, it was the gamblers and entrepreneurs, together with the subscriptions collected in local inns, taverns and shops, which raised funds for matches to be staged, thereby attracting a local supporter base that followed competitive matches within Manchester. Entrepreneurs ‘insulated themselves from outside forces’ by incorporating their complex organisations into the larger interdependent network of consumer sport, where their rules, practices and authority could be protected.<sup>29</sup> The Holden ‘network of practice’ contained a group of individuals with shared ideologies, goals and concerns, who wanted to learn how to improve the interest in, and commitment to, the activity. Each member of the community was a practitioner, sharing their resources, ‘experiences, stories, tools’, with their affiliates and new members in order to address problems, develop solutions and encourage the community to prosper. Through interaction, relationship development and knowledge transfer, the community was strengthened and common interests focused on.<sup>30</sup> The group shared common traits and experiences, and new members had to conform in order to be accepted. By apprenticing in the drinks trade and coming to understand sporting regulations and training principles, knowledge was accumulated, being transferred from existing to novice members who were then accepted as part of the community.<sup>31</sup> Members were not always aware that this was occurring, and their actions were unconscious outcomes of the conversations and interactions that were created both inside and outside the ‘web of

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<sup>27</sup> *Bell’s Life*, February 3, 1866, 6; September 8, 1866, 2; September 15, 1866, 2; September 22, 1866, 7; December 8, 1866, 7; July 6, 1872, 9; *Racing Times*, September 10, 1866, 7; *Manchester Guardian*, August 25, 1866, 8; March 16, 1868, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 10, 1867, 2; August 16, 1871, 8; March 15, 1876, 1; January 13, 1905, 3; *Bell’s Life*, August 8, 1874, 4; May 6, 1876, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Hardy, ‘Entrepreneurs, Organizations, and the Sport Marketplace: Subjects on Search of Historians’, *Journal of Sport History* 13, no. 1 (1986): 15.

<sup>30</sup> Etienne Wenger, ‘Communities of Practice: a Brief Introduction’ (paper presented at the STEP Leadership Workshop, University of Oregon, October 20, 2011), 1-3.

<sup>31</sup> Etienne Wenger, ‘Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems’, *Organization* 7, no. 2 (2000): 227.

interdependences'.<sup>32</sup> According to Wenger, knowledge 'is a matter of displaying competences defined in social communities',<sup>33</sup> and the Holden family exhibited their skill within the sporting network through the varied roles they assumed, positioning themselves at the centre of Manchester's professional pedestrian circuit.

\*Within the community of practice, each individual was positioned differently with power relations distinctive to their position and access to knowledge varied depending on their group status.<sup>34</sup> These communities were characterised by the ever-changing variance of group dynamics, 'one day seen as full members and the next as outsiders as their own self-conceptions alter[ed] at the same time as those of their peers'.<sup>35</sup> Knowledge was accrued, presented, then accepted or rejected, and the power shifted based on this new information. John Jennison and Belle Vue were initially central to the community of practice, staging early pedestrian races, which were heavily promoted by the Holden network. When the Copenhagen Grounds, City Grounds and Royal Oak were established, their proprietors had acquired the latest knowledge and acumen to re-establish pedestrianism, subsequently consigning Belle Vue and its proprietor to the periphery. Managerial hierarchies, such as the Holdens, emerged during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries based on the production and distribution of services, such as sport, with individuals becoming specialists in a single product in order to receive capital gain.<sup>36</sup> The Holden family managed the sporting infrastructure within the city centre through the provision of service (stakeholder, promoters of events, running arenas), goods (referees, timekeepers, officials, articles of agreement, etc.), and the distribution of these to the populace. Even within these networks, there were differences in opinion and approach, but the collective goal connected these individuals together and drove the community forward.<sup>37</sup> The shared interest in developing a viable identity for pedestrianism united the Holden family, and the endeavours and enterprises they supported were all established to further the Manchester sporting landscape. Although this process included incorporating other individuals to provide this service, Holden was gatekeeper of this knowledge, and was therefore at the heart of the Manchester sporting community.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 66.

<sup>33</sup> Wenger, 'Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems': 226.

<sup>34</sup> David Kirk, 'Educational Reform, Physical Culture and the Crisis of Legitimation in Physical Education', *Discourses: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 19, no. 1 (1998): 106.

<sup>35</sup> Carrie Paechter, 'Masculinities and Femininities as Communities of Practice', *Women's Studies International Forum* 26, no. 1 (2003): 75.

<sup>36</sup> Alfred D. Chandler Jr, 'The Emergence of Managerial Capitalism', *Business History Review* 58 (1984): 473.

<sup>37</sup> Wenger, 'Communities of Practice: a Brief Introduction', 1.

<sup>38</sup> Dave Day, 'Craft Coaching and the "Discerning Eye" of the Coach', *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching* 6, no. 1 (2011): 180.



The social standing of sporting entrepreneurs was constantly scrutinised within the press, and success in a densely populated market was obtained through trust. The integrity of the individual was influential in gaining patronage and developing business connections. The Holden family developed their reputation through carefully constructed relationships, tied to respectable figures within the sporting landscape. Piers' reputation as a coursing expert, Hayes' illustrious pedestrian career and management of a premier arena, and Holden Jnrs' sporting knowledge and refereeing abilities gave legitimacy to their sporting network. Although Martin's character was in many ways flawed, he continued to be successful, becoming a key player in the development of Manchester sport, at least partly due to his 'insider' status within the Holden network. By surrounding himself with reliable individuals his less savoury practices could be both hidden and reformed, with more ethical traditions being absorbed through community sharing.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, uncertainties about the standard of this 'new class of entrepreneurs', men like Martin and Cooper, who organised working-class sport, led to a decline in support and eventually relegated professional activities to small pockets of the United Kingdom.<sup>40</sup>

As this study of the Holden collective demonstrates, family connections existed between households as well as within them, creating a web that linked many individuals together in a more complex manner. The 'hidden connections', as presented in this paper, are usually uncovered through 'happy accident or idle curiosity' but it is these connections that require further examination so as to enable the larger community and their impact to be revealed.<sup>41</sup> Although this paper focussed on pedestrianism, the practices employed by the community in developing the sport can also be applied to other sporting pursuits and leisure activities, such as music, art and theatre.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, without the entrepreneurial vision and dedication of such families, athletic amusements and competitions in Britain's industrial cities would have been unable to survive, and the impact of sport within modern British society may not have been as valued.

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<sup>39</sup> Wenger, 'Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems': 227-228.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Burke, 'Trades Football in Melbourne 1896-1909: from Middle Class Leisure to Working-Class Sport', *Sporting Traditions* 19, no. 1 (2002): 10-11.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*, 47.

<sup>42</sup> See Dave Day, 'From Barclay to Brickett: Coaching Practices and Coaching Lives in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century England' (PhD diss., De Montfort University, 2008); Claire Robinson, 'Pantomime in Manchester 1880-1903' (paper presented at the Politics of Pantomime conference, Lancaster, July 7, 2011); Dion Georgiou, "'The Drab Suburban Streets were Metamorphosed into a Veritable Fairyland": Spectacle, Ritual and Festivity in the Ilford Hospital Carnival, 1905-1914' (paper presented at the Institute for Historical Research Sport and Leisure History Seminar Series, London, November 5, 2012).